2: Hockings E-4,5 (1962-1977) 1980
AW50 Badaga AW50



As further evidence of the ceremonial circulation of coinage Ward (1821, lxxi) also discusses Badaga bridewealth,[14] and the payment of twenty Cantirai fanams (coins totalling nearly six rupees) to a mother when, after divorce, she gave custody of her newborn child to her former husband. To judge by later Badaga practices it is very likely that a gift of coins[15] was already an integral part of all family ceremonies. Such a gift was actually a delayed exchange and implied that a return gift was expected later when similar circumstances arose. By 1848 only the East India Company's coinage was in circulation, but a good deal of it was also hoarded by burial or made into ornaments (Ouchterlony, 1848, 72; Shortt & Ouchterlony, 1868, 72).

This system of coinage circulation was very slow and uncertain, as it depended on the occasional celebration of weddings and other family events. Coins clearly had a ritual value for Badagas and were important in this period as a symbolic link between various social units (as to some extent they still are). We have no definite evidence that coins were used for payment of fines to the headmen as early as the eighteenth century; but throughout much of the nineteenth century a regular schedule of fines was maintained in Badaga judicial practice.[16] Coinage did not define values in a local Nilgiri market but did act as a convenient and reliable means of storing credit acquired in the lowland markets where, from 1799, the British pursued a policy of fixing local grain prices by currency values.

By the start of the last century the Badagas had become 'terribly impoverished', and most were heavily in arrears with payment of land revenue. 'The rates of assessment were undoubtedly low', were based on acreage and 'varied with the appearance of the crop at harvest-time' (Grigg, 1880, 312; Francis, 1908, 268). During the first thirty years of British rule a decline in these payments set in. From 1799 to 1813 the average annual revenue from the entire plateau was Rs. 14,762, but over the next fourteen years it fell to Rs. 6,000 (Grigg, 1880, 292; Francis, 1908, 268). In 1801 it was Rs. 13,425; in 1811 it was Rs. 15,067 (Grigg, 1880, 314); in 1821 it was Rs. 9,000 (Mackworth, 1823, 123–126); and by 1830 it was down to Rs. 6,000 (Baber, 1830, 314). There were several reasons for this decline, the most general one being the meagre control over the plateau that could be exercised from Dannaika Ko:ţe; Sullivan attributed the low revenue to lack of a proper road (Grigg, 1880, 280–281, 314). The tax-farmers who operated for some time on the

2: Hockings E-4,5 (1962-1977) 1980
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175 plateau, from 1807,[17] were too demanding of the dues they had
652 paid the East India Company for the privilege of collecting, while
651 in some other years the commune headmen were too slack about the collection. The drought of 1805-1807, the general shortage of coin, the after-effects of Tippu's plundering of Badaga villages, all perhaps contributed to the decline in the payments, if not the fortunes, of the Badagas at this period.

175 Despite the British policy of fixing grain prices they did show
435 fluctuations from year to year. Sarada Raju's excellent study of
458 economic conditions in Madras Presidency during the first half of the nineteenth century clarifies these fluctuations. He does not offer specific data for Coimbatore District (which then included the Nilgiris); nevertheless he is surely justified in his view that on a long-term basis the trend was similar in all districts (Sarada Raju, 1941, 227). As his statistical data for the Presidency adequately confirm (1941, 228–230),

> ... prices were high in the first few years of the nineteenth century. The country had just emerged from a protracted period of war and anarchy during which rival armies and plundering bands had laid whole districts desolate. Cultivators who had fled to the jungles and hills were but gradually returning to their neglected fields.... The period was also marked by a number of scarcities, more or less severe. The very first year, 1799–1800, witnessed a severe dearth and again between 1805 and 1807 occurred another famine, when prices ruled very high. After this prices were persistently low ... from 1807–8 to 1850–51 prices rose above the [economic analyst's] base only on seven occasions; and these were famine years.
>
> When the pendulum swung back, low prices ruled till 1812, when two dry seasons caused a scarcity which lasted till 1813–14. But with the coming of the rains, a lower level was reached and we hear frequent complaints of the "continued low price of grain".... All the Collectors remarked about it, affecting as it did the ryots' [peasants'] ability to pay the revenue (Sarada Raju, 1941, 231–232).[18]

114
(731) While several seasons of adverse weather mentioned by Sarada Raju did give rise to famine conditions in Coimbatore District, which was one of the driest in the Presidency, it is very unlikely that famine also occurred on the Nilgiri Plateau at those times.